

PRESS CONFERENCE:

**Rear Admiral Gregory Smith, Director of Communications, Deputy Spokesman,
Multi-National Force – Iraq**

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CHARLES LEVINSON FROM USA TODAY

JOSH PARLOW FROM THE WASHINGTON POST

JAMES BAYS FROM AL-JAZEERA ENGLISH

DANIEL SMITH FROM BAHRAIN TV

ALEXANDRA ZAVIS FROM THE LA TIMES

BRIAN FROM AFP

THOMAS SIFE

REP 1-17

***REP1 = REPORTER 1**

***INT = INTERPRETER**

RDML SMITH: Good afternoon. As-Salāmu `Alaykum. Iraq is in a tough fight, a fight between a lethal minority who wants to destabilize the country by indiscriminately killing innocent men, women, and children; executing a campaign of intimidation and terror in order to instill a corrupt and foreign ideology of hate and division. And the overwhelming majority of Iraqis who find such ideology bankrupt and have rejected violence in order to help build a new Iraq. Much of this violence has been carried out by foreign fighters – al-Qaida foreign fighters – which is the sole topic of my brief to you today. We have captured and interrogated many of these foreign fighters, and I would like to share with you the insights learned from talking to and discussing with 48 of them. The typical foreign terrorist is a single male. The average age is 22. Most of these terrorists have no military experience, unless they came from countries that had a military draft, in which case, they had minimal compulsory service. They were primarily engaged in low-wage income and occupations. They were taxi drivers and construction workers. Their families were typically in the lower and lower-middle economic classes. Most of these terrorists were from large families, and found it hard to be noticed to make their own mark in life. Most of these young men wanted to make an impression, but paradoxically, they did not tell their families they were going off to Iraq to fight for al-Qaida out of fear of disapproval. Most of the terrorists described their

own fathers as harsh and often abusive. They described their upbringing as religious, but not extremist. In most cases, they were lonely, impressionable young men who wanted to find recognition and acceptance. And the al-Qaida recruiters were trained to prey upon such desire for friendship. As their recruitment began, these men would usually be engaged in seemingly harmless conversations about Islam. Only after weeks of general religious dialogue would the recruiters begin to bring up the twisted interpretations of Islam and their jihad in Iraq. Often they were first approached by a recruiter at their local mosque. Other times, they were approached at their workplace, after which they would be invited to discussions at the mosques that were frequented by the recruiters. When the process of indoctrination would begin, it would often start by showing the potential recruits videos from Iraq—heavily edited videos of Americans supposedly abusing Iraqis, and al-Qaida attacks on Americans. The indoctrination always used two common themes: “Americans were abusing the people of Iraq,” and “The recruits had a duty to avenge those abuses by joining al-Qaida and the jihad here inside Iraq.” The captured terrorists told us al-Jazeera footage was often used in their indoctrination sessions. Most of the captured foreigners flew into the Damascus airport, and they moved by ground transportation into Iraq. The facilitators responsible for moving the men from Syria into Iraq were described

as irreligious. They would entertain the foreign recruits at nightclubs and bars during the months it sometimes took to get the recruits between the two countries. The foreign detainees told similar stories about what happened to them once they were smuggled into Iraq. They told us their al-Qaida Iraq handlers were deeply suspicious of the foreign fighters from other lands. They looked down on the imported terrorists and treated them very harshly. The recruits were sequestered. They often were underfed and kept in a famished state, particularly those who were supposed to commit suicide attacks. During their interrogations, these 48 men told us they were lured here with the promise they would be killing Americans, but they were disappointed that most of the violence they saw was directed at the Iraqi people – fellow Muslims. Again and again, we heard this reality bothered the recruits. The disconnect between the stories they were told as they were recruited and indoctrinated and the reality of a war against innocent civilians was deeply disturbing. They had not come here to kill Iraqi civilians. They also complained of a different shading of the truth. Many of the recruits told us they were promised they would be killing, seeing...I'm sorry, would be seeing a victorious al-Qaida. And instead, they found an organization constantly being hunted by security forces and on the run and rejected by the Iraqi people. They felt misled. These foreign terrorists told us that,

eventually, they felt discouraged, and just wanted to go home. But their al-Qaida facilitators had their passports and all their money. They felt trapped and hopeless. Many told us they were heavily pressured to become suicide terrorists. Some of the foreigners had signed up for this shameful crime, but most had reported that the attempts to pressure them to murder fellow Muslims took place once they arrived here in Iraq. They were told, quote, “This is your duty. This is what you can do for the jihad. You will be a martyr. This is what we need you to do,” unquote. Most of the detainees told us that once in Iraq, they reverted to just trying to survive. Every single one of the 48 detainees told us they were smuggled into Iraq with the idea they would fight against Americans, but eventually they all just wanted to go home. They were actually relieved to be captured. Some of them even cried tears of relief during the initial interrogations. Ironically, they were relieved to having been captured by the very Americans that their recruiters said they would be here in Iraq to kill. As you can see in this chart, at the peak in mid-2007, about 120 foreign terrorists were being imported into Iraq each month. Now, that number is down to about 40 or 50 monthly. 41% of the foreign terrorists were brought to Iraq from countries in North and East Africa. 40% are from Saudi Arabia. Reduction in foreign fighter flow can be attributed to a number of factors, including coalition and Iraqi security force

interdiction of the foreign fighter networks here in Iraq, the tightening of visa and immigration controls, airport and border enforcement, as well as general increased awareness by the many host nations of the consequences to their own security in the human trafficking of terrorism. Approximately 50% of the imported foreign terrorists become suicide bombers, as we said in the past. But about 90% of the suicide bombers in Iraq are in fact foreigners. Foreign terrorists are responsible for the most destructive operations conducted by al-Qaida in Iraq. They are responsible for the most spectacular and profane attacks on innocent men, women, and children. They cause the most civilian casualties. The stories of these 48 foreign fighters tell us a great deal about the enemy Iraq faces. Al-Qaida Iraq imports foreign fighters to do a job that few others will do: kill fellow Muslims using large amounts of explosives and blowing themselves up. Sadly, we have witnessed this all too often inside of Iraq. And the increasing trend of individuals wearing suicide vests is, of course, of concern to coalition and Iraqi security forces. It is a difficult target to stop. And the only effective way to take down the networks is to take down the networks that feed this type of terrorism. We still have a lot of work to do, and the knowledge gained by the interrogation of these 48 foreign fighters will aid us in our efforts to reduce this foreign-borne threat to Iraq. With that, I'd be happy to take your

questions. Yes, Ma'am.

LINDT: Regarding these...uh, this is Amanda Lindt, Hope Press TV. These 48 detainees that you're speaking of, what will happen to them now? Are they going to be...are they in US-led prisons? And are they going to be tried under the Iraqi justice system?

RDML SMITH: As with all the detainees taken off the battlefield by coalition forces, they are in coalition detention. Their cases are reviewed, both for the criminality of their past activities. And in cases where there's proven criminal activity that can be linked to the individuals, their processed and then introduced into the Iraqi court system. For these 48 individuals, I don't have specifics for you, but that's the general sense of how a detainee progresses through the system. And as with all detainees, their cases will be periodically reviewed to determine if they in fact remain a threat to the security here inside of Iraq. There have been instances where foreign fighters have returned to their home countries. And those cases, again, are reviewed on an individual basis as opposed to a group basis.

LINDT: If I may ask you one more quick question. Regarding the large scale operation in Mosul that we've been hearing about for a long time with the purpose of, as the US has said, eliminating al-Qaida in Iraq, when is this expected to begin?

RDML SMITH: The operation has been underway, in fact, for quite some time. If you look at our operations, both the Iraqi and coalition forces in Mosul, they've been underway for years. The current set of operations began at the first of this year with Operation Phantom Phoenix, began a increased effort in all the northern provinces of Iraq, where we know al-Qaida has now moved into. Diyala is a region, of course, that talked about a great deal about that at the end of 2007. And now is for...as the al-Qaida have been pushed out of Diyala and up into Hamrin Mountains, they're residing in Mosul as one of their last specific strongholds, for which activities by both coalition and Iraqi security forces are targeting those various enemies inside Mosul, and will do so in the coming weeks and months ahead.

REP1: Asking question in Arabic.

INT: Kurdistan TV. Do you have an update about the date of executing Ali Hassan Majeed?

RDML SMITH: We have still not received an official request from the government of Iraq to turn over Majeed to the...for the purpose of execution. Until that request is received, he remains in coalition detention.

Yes, sir.

REP2: Asking question in Arabic.

INT: Question from al-Moten TV. Do you have any information about the assassination of the Archbishop Rahho? New update? The Archbishop in Mosul.

RDML SMITH: No new update. It is still disturbing, obviously, that a man of his stature and his presence here in Iraq would be kidnapped, presumably for ransom. His death is still being viewed with great concern, given the circumstances. We don't know precisely at the cause of his death. We're still waiting to determine that and learn from that. But as we've seen in reports that he may have died from natural causes. Nonetheless, he was taken prisoner by a group of individuals who we believe were trying to extort funds from both the church and from his family. But no new information to add beyond that which has already been reported. Front row, please. Wait for the...

GOODE: Erica Goode, New York Times. We've read wire stories, I think coming off a Washington Post story saying that Senator McCain will be coming to Baghdad. Can you tell us when he is coming, or

where he will go once he is here?

RDML SMITH: We imagine we wouldn't announce ahead of time the arrival of any senior official from any country, including Senator McCain's schedule. He'll be...he is planning on being here this week I believe, and once he's on the ground, his folks will identify his schedule and make that available to you. Third row, please. Microphone, please.

LEVINSON: Hi, Charles Levinson, USA Today. The Reconciliation Conference that's starting Tuesday that was announced yesterday, I guess it was...what can you tell us about it? What exactly is it going to be? Where is it going to be? What's it going to consist of? Are you guys involved? Any, any information would be great.

RDML SMITH: I don't have any time, I mean details for you. I did read about that this morning, and I apologize for not having a little more detail. There is a conference, I understand, that's going to be held. It's... bring together senior members of the Iraqi government, along with provincial leadership, tribal leadership, to begin looking at some key reconciliation issues. But beyond that, I don't have anymore detail for you. Second row, please.

REP3: Asking question in Arabic.

INT: Question from Sumariya TV. I have two questions. First, concerning the case of al-Zamali, it's been a year and now he has been released. And what are the consequences and the details about this case? And the second question is about those who have been sentenced to death by the Iraqi Tribunal Court. What is the mechanism of giving them to the executive side? Do you wait for a request from the executive side from the Iraqi government? What is the exact mechanism? Could you explain this for us?

RDML SMITH: The MOH trials that you referred to, obviously, we share concern, as all do, that to...that the rule of law here was perhaps undermined by...through intimidation. And the outcomes there did not have the full opportunity to have the courts review all the information available, obviously because witnesses were not available to state their claims. This is an issue that I know that the Government of Iraq is currently investigating. Judge Mehd has formed an investigative committee to look into the various allegations of intimidations. And we would wait the outcomes of that particular investigation to comment any farther. As far as the turnover of individuals, again, they're in coalition detention for potential execution by the Government of Iraq. The way that's formally

done is once the Government of Iraq has agreed to the execution date, a formal request comes in from the Prime Minister's office to the coalition. Once that's received, then the individual is turned over to Government of Iraq officials for the final execution, and that has not been received in this case. All the way in the back. And we'll work our way forward.

REP4: Asking question in Arabic.

INT: The general inspector for the social and labor has been detained. Why has that happened?

RDML SMITH: I'm not aware of the detention. Is he detained by Iraqi or coalition forces, sir?

REP4: Speaking in Arabic.

INT: He has been detained by the American forces.

RDML SMITH: I'll have to get back to you on that one. I didn't know that. Second row.

REP5: Asking question in Arabic.

INT: Question from Radio Sawa. I have two questions. First, you've indicated that some of the foreign fighters are being returned to their countries. What's the number of those numbers who returned to their countries, whether in Saudi and other countries? And there were some reports, American reports that criticized the performance of the American military here, who criticized the performance of the national advisory of Prime Minister Maliki because she ..Basimah Sa'idi...because she didn't want al-Sahwa join the Iraqi security forces. Are those all criticism is it still effective? And how would you comment about this.

RDML SMITH: The precise number of individuals that have been, were in detention have been returned to their home countries, I don't have available to me. But I know the numbers are limited, small numbers. Those are areas where in which countries who have expressed an interest in returning, having their citizens return home do in most cases do so because they have a program of their own to deal with these individuals. In many cases, they don't return back as and simply return back to society, but they're moved into various programs or into their own detention facilities within their country. As far as the Sons of Iraq and the criticism, I think, again, there's been a long discussion about the role the Government of Iraq is playing in this

area. And I think Dr. Basama has begun a very constructive though the [unintelligible] process of embracing this program and beginning to design a way of reaching out to the provinces to ensure that the Sons of Iraq that are interested in becoming members of the security force are given an opportunity to do that. We've seen a lot of progress over the last month or two, and I think that's a good news story for Iraq in terms the way in which this is being dealt with and the way the programs are being established. Third row, please.

PARLOW: Josh Parlow with the Washington Post. Could you give us an update on what has happened in Kut over the last week or several days as far as, you know, in terms of the clashes and the response by the government?

RDML SMITH: It would appear in most instances these are local groups that are having...their differences being are being dealt with through violence and it's limited in terms of the scope and scale. Security forces in the area have for the most part dealt with the violence. Security forces, Iraqi security forces, have, as I understand, detained several of the individuals involved in these particular clashes. Do not view it as a widespread issue or concern outside of Kut, certainly. The coalition forces were asked earlier in the first couple

days of the crisis to use air power to deal with a particular issue at that time. But by and large, it's been Iraqi security forces on the ground dealing with it.

PARLOW: Just a follow up to that. Do you have a number of how many people have been detained? And is there...could you comment on what you consider Iraq security forces' detention practices at this point? And is it, you know, in the past in this country, there have been trouble with arresting a large number of people, not all of them involved in the crimes and that causing tension. Is that something you see with Iraqi security forces or not?

RDML SMITH: We work very closely, as you know, with security forces to both advise and consult in areas like this. And of course, an operation in which you're in the middle of trying to sort out what, who's at fault and who's involved, you may, in fact, bring in more than end up being detained long-term. We do the same thing. In many of our instances you have to screen individuals to make certain that you've got the right members that you actually want to hold in detention. So, I suspect the Iraqi security forces are doing much the same. I do not know precisely the number that have been, I've seen reports as high as 70 or 80 have been detained. But you'd have to ask Iraqi security forces on their number. All right, fourth row.

BAYS:

James Bays from al-Jazeera English. Two questions for you, one on the foreign fighters. Can you give us an estimate of how many foreign fighters are still out there and how many you're still facing? And the second question, we're getting reports of a suicide bombing in the last couple of hours in Mosul on a KDP office. Do you have any information on that?

RDML SMITH:

I've seen, I just saw it before I came over here, some initial reports on that. But nothing to update you on Mosul. As far as a number of foreign fighters, it's much along the same lines as trying to determine the number of other extremists out there. As you know, I've said that there are around 40 or 50 coming per month. More than half of those become suicide bombers. Many of those suicide bombers are successful, so they naturally attrite on the battlefield. There are over 200 in detention, foreigners in our, in coalition detention. There are several hundreds, obviously, in Iraqi detention. We have seen an increased number, or at least an increase in the request for foreign fighters to become suicide bombers by al-Qaida. We, I think we recognize they believe that the suicide bomber wearing a vest has become a useful tool to them to bring about their violence. And so, we expect them to try to increase the number of foreign fighters brought into country for that purpose. But again, I think the interdiction, to the borders, the work being done by host

nation governments like Syria, Saudi Arabia, in particular, have reduced the available recruits to some degree and also limited their movements in and out of those countries. But we continue to watch the networks very closely because again, if you take down the networks here in Iraq, you really do limit the availability of those foreign fighters to access into the country and be used as, in this case, suicide bombers. Third row, please.

KIMORA: My name is Kimora from Kyoto Japanese News Agency. Follow-up question about the foreign fighters. What is the link between these 48 foreign fighters and the regional al-Qaida? Is it only philosophical or ideological link? And also, the link between the recruit network of al-Qaida in Iraq and regional al-Qaida, is there any substantial, raw material link?

RDML SMITH: The real link is not to ideology in the terms of the roles of a foreign fighter facilitator. They're very much in the business of just finding foreign fighters to bring into this country. It's a way to...it's a business, it's a capital business in which they make a considerable amount of money moving and trafficking humans across the border to fight. The recruiters, I suspect, are in it for, from a financial gain purposes. The actual foreign fighters themselves, as I pointed out, many of them do not come from an extremist ideology background.

They are indoctrinated and brought into this very slowly by the recruiters. But the links between the use of foreign fighters and al-Qaida writ large is worldwide. The employment of a foreign fighter network, the sophistication of the network is designed to support al-Qaida efforts beyond just Iraq. The networks inside of Iraq, again, are purposely tied towards meeting the needs of the local al-Qaida leadership here inside of Iraq. So you've got...go ahead.

KIMORA: How do you receive again, a specific, like orders or instruction from the regional al-Qaida? Mainly they are, the al-Qaida in Iraq is doing on their own. And just, just, you know, for the purpose of the jihadist ideals, is that what you're saying?

RDML SMITH: Yeah. No. Keep in mind again that the al-Qaida in Iraq, the organization al-Qaida Iraq, is largely foreign led. And the ideology is very much shared that and the central leadership of al-Qaida. The rank and file foreign fighter that comes in here, as I mentioned to you, is a young 22-year-old that probably isn't predisposed to ideology. He's brought here for, again, for reasons of which he's been recruited and largely to kill Americans. But the links between central Iraqi al-Qaida leadership and regional leadership here in Iraq is done more from a broader sense of the jihad. The day-to-day activities of the al-Qaida here in Iraq are largely led by the foreign

elements inside of Iraq, not by the central leadership elsewhere.

Second row.

REP6: Asking question in Arabic.

INT: Question from Iraq Freedom Radio. You expected that there will be an increase in the suicide bombers. And do you think al-Qaida managed to infiltrate the Awakening Councils that have been formed in Iraq?

RDML SMITH: We have seen a slow increase, a modest increase, if you will, over time of the use of suicide vest bombers. Early...or late in 2007, there was somewhere around eight or ten a month. In the month of February it grew to 18. Each month it grew by about two per month. So there is an increase there. We're also, though, seeing that a lot of average al-Qaida fighters are now wearing suicide vests in which before they're captured they're often blowing themselves up just prior to that capture. That's something we had not seen anywhere. We used to see just the more senior leadership of al-Qaida wearing suicide vests. But now, we're seeing the average fighter wearing a vest. So some of those numbers are, in fact, fighters themselves who are captured and then blow themselves up just prior to capture. So the use of...we do think that al-Qaida will

continue to use individuals as suicide bombers because the technique is, has been, obviously, effective on their part. As far as the...al-Qaida has, in fact, most likely infiltrated Sons of Iraq in some areas. And again, it's an area where the local leadership of the Sons of Iraq, the concerned local citizen groups, are in the best position to know whether or not they've got infiltrators among them. And they're very diligent about watching for any kind of loyalty or any issues associated with that activity. And so, I suspect we'll have to keep a very watchful eye on the infiltration of Sons of Iraq by al-Qaida. Third row. I'll come back to you.

REP7: Asking question in Arabic.

INT: Question from Al Watan TV. You've said that there's an increase in the suicide bombers at the beginning. Do we expect that, or do you expect any huge suicide attacks inside Baghdad, like those that happened in Karada district for instance?

RDML SMITH: It's very difficult to predict what the target will be by al-Qaida. The only thing I would say is that, that we will do all we can through the security network and the security that's put in place to limit their activity. But as I mentioned to you, what you need to do is go after the network, not the individual. Once the individual has strapped a bomb on, has walked into a neighborhood, it's going to be very

difficult to stop that. There have been some very brave...both Sons of Iraq, Iraqi police officers, Iraqi army officers who have seen approaching individuals and have stopped them. Even then, that often still results in loss of life to that particular unit that's patrolling that neighborhood. It's going to be something we'll have to keep a very watchful eye on, because an event like Karada is obviously very disturbing, and no one wants to see that happen. But it's not something that we can guarantee that we can stop. Third row, please.

SMITH: Hi. Daniel Smith, Bahrain TV. How will William Fallon's resignation effect operations on the ground in Iraq? And given at least the public perception of his resignation being connected to US policy toward Iran, have there been any changes in orders concerning operations on or near the Iranian border?

RDML SMITH: First of all, obviously, Admiral Fallon has been a great partner in supporting the activities here in Iraq and the region in terms of the war on terrorism. And so, we would suspect that the leadership that follows him would have a similar focus and energy behind trying to fight this very important fight out here. And as far as any new orders or changes to policy, certainly that's something I would not discuss from here, but safe to be said that this is a collective effort,

both by the ground commanders here, General Petraeus, his boss back in Central Command, still Admiral Fallon, by the way, and the leadership back in the Pentagon, all the way to the White House, that deals with all these issues, not only here in Iraq, but on the borders. Second row.

REP8: Asking question in Arabic.

INT: There's a talk now about an agreement, a political agreement or a deal among the political blocs so that Sultan Hashem would not be executed. And there are talks that you are also part of this deal. Is that true, that the Multi-National Forces is part of this deal as well?

RDML SMITH: I'm not aware of any discussion between the coalition and Multi-National Force – Iraq...and any elements inside the government of Iraq dealing with making any adjustments to what has already been carried out by a court of law, the rule of law in this case, a court that's judged these individuals to be guilty and their intent is to execute. The issue here is when the Government of Iraq asks formally of the US, in this case the coalition, to turn over these individuals, we'll do so in compliance with the law. But there's no negotiations about whether they should or shouldn't do it. This is a matter for the Iraq people to decide. It's been determined by the

courts, and now it has to be carried out by the government. All the way in the back there.

ZAVIS: Hi, Alexandra Zavis from the LA Times. There was a police report this morning of a car bombing that targeted a private security contractor convoy in Mansur. I was just wondering if you had any details on that and knew what company was involved.

RDML SMITH: No, in fact the first report identified exactly what you said. And as most often takes several hours to sort out precisely what contractor's involved. But I don't have any information for you yet. Right there.

BRIAN: Brian from AFP. Could you expand on the 48 people you keep quoting? Are they recent detainees? And apparently you've got 200 al-Qaida in detention. Why are we focusing on 48? Can you tell us who they are?

RDML SMITH: These are 48 individuals who over the last four months were detained. So they're, what we wanted to do was give you a sense of what the most current detainee is telling us about how they got into the country. Keep in mind that some of those, if they were picked up four months ago, their first recruitment might have been

three months or so before that. So, within the last six or seven months, they went from being a citizen of a country being recruited to being brought into, again, mostly through Damascus airport, moved by ground into Iraq, and then. In fact, those months could even go further back than that. Often, within the first thirty days they're used one way or the other as a foreign fighter, usually as a bomber. Those are the individuals. And I already for the most part gave you the sort of demographics of who they were, the countries they're from. I think that provides with you with as much more as I can give you. Right in front.

REP9: With regards to these profiles, I assume these are all men.

RDML SMITH: They are.

REP9: But as we've been here tracking the last few weeks, months, there's been an increase in female suicide bombers. Do you feel that those are also foreign fighters? Or are those more homegrown, so to speak? Is that a different set of concerns and problems or...?

RDML SMITH: Unfortunately, the use of women as suicide bombers appears to mostly be targeting Iraqi women. We're not aware of necessarily, we do not have any female foreign fighters among this group. And

I don't know precisely among the population of all foreigners in detention if any of those are women. I don't believe that they are, although I'll check for you. The issue here is that you've got in most recent two women that blew themselves up earlier in February, they were both Iraqi women. And historically, the twenty or odd that have done it over the last four or five years, some have come from foreign countries, but others have been right here from Iraq.

REP9: And in terms to follow up on that, I know a month ago that it was announced that a doctor who was detained to be investigated in connection with the female suicide bombers. Any update on him? Is he still in detention? Has he been charged?

RDML SMITH: He remains in detention. He's still a person of interest. He's still being questioned. Right there in the curtain.

SIFE: Thomas Sife is my name. Newspaper de Presse. I, could you give us an update on the situation of the group of American contractors and an Austrian contractor from Crescent Security? There was some news that DNA samples have been found. That has been confirmed. Any news beyond that at this point?

RDML SMITH: No. No more news beyond that.

REP10: You mentioned this, but can you say how long the foreign fighters are typically in Iraq before they try to carry out their attacks? And do they get training here? Do they move around the country a lot? Or do they try to do it as quickly as possible?

RDML SMITH: What we hear from the stories that the typical foreign fighter gets brought in usually to one or two safe houses. And within about the first thirty days, they're usually asked to go commit an act of suicide, if they're brought here as a suicide bomber. If they're brought in as a fighter, their story's a little bit different. Obviously, they're integrated into a fighting unit and they simply go about and do their business wherever unit they're assigned to. But the suicide bomber tends to be sequestered. As we pointed out, fed a little more of a radical indoctrination while they're here, but not trained per se, just simply told what they're going to do when they're told to do it. Go ahead.

REP11: If I could follow up on Josh's earlier question on Kut. You've had, you've had those clashes recently. And then before that you had sort of everything that was going on in Diwaniyah. Are you concerned that these sort of this, this campaign, I guess, has been

more than just a security element to it? It might have a political element to it also? And if so...

RDML SMITH: Well, I really believe that down in Kut you're really seeing, again, the struggle between groups of gangs, the criminals that are fighting out for power in that area and little do with anything outside of the local area quite frankly. Going back.

REP12: Asking question in Arabic.

INT: Question from Biladi TV. The decision of the general amnesty of the law, will it include the detainees inside the American detention facilities or not?

RDML SMITH: The law, as it's written, deals only with Iraqis in Iraqi detention, not in coalition detention. As you know, there are, our program is designed to individuals who no longer are a security risk to Iraq. They then go through a reintegration program that involves an education...training. Eventually they meet an Iraqi judge and swear allegiance back to Iraq. They have sponsorship back in their home town, an area of their tribe. And then they're recommended for release through a joint panel of Iraqi and coalition officers. Around fifty or so detainees are released on any given day from coalition

detention facilities. Second row.

REP13: Asking question in Arabic.

INT: Question from [unintelligible] TV. Don't you think that the detention or the timing of the detention for like two years could impact negatively on this person? Because he needs, he might, you know, get in contact with extremists inside the detention facility. This long procedure, or this long time of the questioning inside, and after he's being released, this will have a negative impact on the citizen, this long, the long timing of the detention and the investigation.

RDML SMITH: If you had a chance to visit one of our detention facilities, you would see that the most extreme members of the population, those who have the most radical views have been isolated from the rest of the population of detainees, really reducing what you point out would be the negative consequences of having this extreme ideology being forced on to more moderate individuals who are in detention with them. We have found this to be a very important step that we've taken in the last 12 to 17 months of isolating inside of our detention facilities, again, those most radical elements. And in the last 17 weeks, there hasn't been a single act of violence inside

of our detention facilities. There's been a reduction of the intimidation that's often associated with that kind of activity. And I think the program's working pretty well. I think you had a follow up.

REP13: Asking question in Arabic.

INT: There are some violations...One of the Arabic channels revealed a violation in one of the prisons. And the American forces were accused of negligence. And there was some detainees who disappeared in those prisons, and the American forces said that it's difficult to someone to disappear or even...

RDML SMITH: The program you're referring to is on Arabiyah, and it described a single detainee whose story, sadly enough, did involve him being in effect tortured by fellow inmates. That was, that individual received, once that event occurred, received extensive medical care by the coalition in detention. 17 individuals have been found responsible for that event. They're all being held accountable for their activities. They will all go through a legal process through the legal court process to determine exactly the consequences of their actions. But there is accountability for what happened that particular day. And sadly this individual was tortured, was

mutilated. He is now home, as you know, the story told. And it's sad that it occurred. But that occurred many, many months ago. And since that time, again, the process in place now has removed those most radical elements from the main population of detainees to isolate that kind of activity and behavior. Front row.

REP14: The UN...

RDML SMITH: Microphone.

REP14: The UN yesterday, as I think they have in the past, asked for access for human rights monitors to American detainee facilities. Is that something you folks are considering?

RDML SMITH: The access to facilities is not the issue here. I think the issue as I understand it was the...basically the unlimited access to every single detainee without supervision. Those procedures are not in place for an individual to come into the detention facilities and have access to any detainee they want without any kind of supervision or oversight. That rules are in place to provide oversight, to provide control in that area. And so, they'll have access to the detention facilities certainly, as others do, but not unconstrained access.

REP14: As I understand it the Iraqi...

RDML SMITH: Microphone.

REP14: As I understand it they do have that kind of access to the Iraqi facilities.

RDML SMITH: I don't know that. This is a US policy regarding detention affairs. And you can imagine we would want to have some control and some rules in place to ensure that there's proper oversight of access of individuals into detention facilities. But there's plenty of access by not only the UN but many other organizations that come into our detention facilities on a daily basis to both visit with detainees, discuss with them, in group and private sessions as well as observe any and all activity associated with their detention. Yes, sir.

REP15: Asking question in Arabic.

INT: Yesterday there was a report on the Babiliyah that Sajidah...or Saddam's wife, talked about what happened during al-Najaf or al-Zirka. And she said the Iraqi security forces were supplied or supplied the American forces supplied false information to the American forces. I'm not sure who said that.

RDML SMITH: I think we're going to have to get clarity on the question. Could you help with? Summarize?

REP15: Asking question in Arabic.

INT: The Babiliyah TV in during a program on operations on the events that happened al-Zirka. And the report gave information through the TV...gave information that the Iraqi security forces gave false information to the American forces. They give false information, because the lady was called [unintelligible] she appeared on the show and she said the American or the Iraq security forces gave false information to the American, through the Americans during the Zirka events.

RDML SMITH: After that long and lengthy twice explanation, I'm still have to offer you no response. I'm not familiar with that event or the allegations. I'm sorry. But we'd happy to take your question and get back to you. Sir.

REP16: Asking question in Arabic.

INT: Question from al-Arabiyah TV...Oh...newspaper. We know that

the armed groups that are fighting in Ninawa right now, or Diyala province are connected with al-Qaida. But in the south, there are also armed groups, and we don't know who those are and if they are connected with any side. We don't know if they're connected with al-Qaida or not. Could you clarify this? Especially those in Basra.

RDML SMITH: Well, certainly in the south we believe the majority of the armed groups there that are using violence to bring about whatever ends they hope to bring about. Again, much of it is local power, local control, criminal gangs. But we also do know that Iran has influenced the activities of armed groups in the south, the special groups and certainly in one case. But other groups that are broken away from Jaish al-Mahdi are now turning themselves, turning more towards Iran for that support—economic support and other types of support to conduct their activities. And again the support coming out of Iran is believed to be from groups inside of Iran, elements inside of Iran who are not honoring the stated pledges of the senior leadership of Iran to provide for the prosperous and economic and peaceful transition here inside of Iraq. But there are groups in south Iraq that clearly do rely on—heavily—foreign influence, foreign contributions to conduct their activities. Any other questions? Sure.

REP17: Very quickly, thank you. This week marks the five year anniversary of the war in Iraq. If you could just quickly sum up the situation in Iraq as you see it today.

RDML SMITH: Well, I've only been here just over ten months, and so I'll give you my ten-month perspective. It's difficult to have a five year perspective unless you've been here. And then if you've lived through this war for the last five years and have your own perspectives. Mine, I think, is one of certainly hope and a positive outlook when you consider where we were at a year ago at this time, very difficult time for Iraq. Iraqis were suffering, both here in Baghdad and elsewhere. The violence levels were just dramatically higher than they are today. The numbers of individuals who were losing their lives on any given day was truly disturbing. But today, here we are, again ten months later for me, at a time when the violence levels are still too high. There's still too many Iraqis dying for no reason other than the fact that they went to marketplace and happened to be at the wrong place at the wrong time or for many other reasons. There's still indiscriminate violence that's occurring. We still face the same enemies. Al-Qaida's still there. There's still enemies, as you point out, of the people in the south that have nothing to do with al-Qaida. There's criminality that needs to be dealt with. But there is great hope when you consider that the

people of Iraq have largely rejected violence, are looking for a positive way forward, and are participating and partnering to make that happen, both in a political way at the local, regional, and the national level of political governance, but also in their own personal way, the Sons of Iraq, as individuals who are making a choice about telling, giving a tip that will lead to the capture of an individual or a weapons cache. Those are all very, very positive trends. And so, I'm very hopeful. That is where we are today, and March of 2008 will provide a really an opportunity to move forward beyond this and reduce the levels of violence even further. Shukran. Any other questions? Why, thank you. We'll have a follow-on press brief today that will occur as soon as we can put the...reset the room. Staff Lieutenant General Dohy is the Deputy Chief of Staff for the Iraqi Army for Training and Doctrine, and Brigadier General Johnny Torrent Spence is the Deputy Commanding General of the Multi-National Corps - Iraq, Training Corps – Iraq that will discuss the latest update on readiness and training of the Iraqi Army. And I thank you very much.